

The Department of French & Italian presents

Contact, Shift, and Structural Change in Franco-American New England

A Dissertation Defense by Laura Demsey

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

11:00 am

**Indiana Memorial Union
Sassafras Room**

Please notify Dr. Kevin Rottet
(krottet@indiana.edu) to RSVP.



In the New England region of the U.S., there exist large communities of French speakers, most of whom are descendants of immigrants who came from Quebec between about 1840

and 1910 to work in the mills and factories. This migration from Quebec caused tension between the Anglo-Saxon Americans and the Franco-Americans; Franco-American culture was ridiculed and their language all but eradicated in public life. Today, a lack of intergenerational transmission, along with influence from the dominant language of English, has caused linguistic change in the French of New England. Due to bilingualism with English and its minority status, New England French has the potential for extensive contact-induced influence from English, which may be seen in its grammar. The structures explored in this study all include a basic grammatical element—the definite determiner—to examine a microcosm of the larger system.

This study investigates English influence in four phenomena that include definite determiner produced by native speakers of French in two New England speech communities: Lewiston, Maine and Manchester, New Hampshire. I predict that speakers may exhibit influence from English in specific ways: omitting articles with place names (e.g., “Étaient dans New Brunswick, then”) and with generic and abstract nouns (e.g., “Ø patience est une vertu”), using English word choice and order with body parts (e.g., “J’ai brossé mes dents”) and in post-nominal adjective superlative constructions (e.g., “le plus intelligent étudiant dans la classe”), and more. I also hypothesize that age and exposure to and use of French are two main factors that correlate with higher rates of English-like structures. Results show evidence of the predicted kinds of influence from English and suggest that those with the least exposure to and the most contextually limited use of French produce English-like structures most frequently.



Committee:

Dr. Kevin Rottet, *Chair, French & Italian*
Dr. David Stringer, *Second Language Studies*
Dr. Cynthia Fox, *University at Albany*

Dr. Laurent Dekydtspotter, *French & Italian*
Dr. Barbara Vance, *French & Italian*